

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 30, 2020

Florida Surgeon General Scott Rivkees
Florida Department of Health
4052 Bald Cypress Way
Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Dr. Rivkees:

As COVID-19 spreads across our state and overwhelms our medical resources and care capacity, I urge the Florida Department of Health to keep the most vulnerable communities in mind.

As March, Developmental Disabilities Month, comes to a close, I would like to advocate for and highlight the importance of including those with developmental disabilities in the conversation of combatting the pandemic and considering their needs during times of crisis. Group homes caring for people with disabilities require the same level of resources and assistance as every other care facility. The Florida Department of Health must protect the dignity of every single human life and remember the importance of protecting such communities.

Yesterday, I received a call from a constituent in Miami Dade County who let me know that a caretaker from a local group home tested positive for COVID-19, yet the facility was still having trouble obtaining a sufficient amount of protective equipment to keep every resident and staff member safe. This news is deeply concerning to me.

Americans with developmental disabilities living in these facilities have diverse needs. While not all are at a greater risk of contracting COVID-19, specific conditions may leave many more susceptible. Moreover, among those who have a greater need for assistance in their everyday lives, social distancing and self-isolation is much more difficult. If their caregivers contract the virus and cannot otherwise continue their support, individuals with disabilities are left with few options. We must remember the value of these group homes and their critically important work and do everything we can to make sure the members and essential service providers are protected with appropriate levels of PPE and preventive supplies.

My letter comes to you at a time in which I recognize that the COVID-19 outbreak is placing increasing strain on our nation's healthcare system. While I understand the importance of prioritizing our healthcare workforce on the frontlines combatting this pandemic, I believe that the wisest actions our community can take immediately is to ensure that the most vulnerable populations have the resources they need to stay healthy. We must remember to protect our neediest populations and make sure that they have the supplies they need to maintain their health, safety, dignity, and independence. Individuals with disabilities are often the first to feel impacts from major crises, we must make sure they are not left behind as the last to recover.

Sincerely,



Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress

